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ABSTRACT

The ubiquitous use of the term "transformation" in experiential education has blurred its specific meaning in any given case. Designing an effective curriculum requires instructors to determine what kind of transformation they would like to generate. A review of two research projects provides insights about different types of personal change and development. The projects examined outcomes of a classic Outward Bound course to develop self-confidence and outdoor leadership skills and those of a university-level travel course that sought to challenge students' assumptions about the earth and their relationship to it. In both projects, personal change or transformation varied among individuals in four ways: content or area of change, degree or intensity of change, longevity of change postcourse, and the extent of integration with other areas of students' lives. A typology of transformational aims is suggested: skill (to develop skills according to given guidelines); citizenship (to develop students' views of the world and their role in it); and ecological (to transform society by encouraging students to rethink the existing social order and cultural assumptions). Contains 13 references. (SV)

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PATHWAYS TO TRANSFORMATION

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Introduction

The ubiquitous use of the term 'transformation' in experiential education has blurred its specific meaning in any given case. Designing an effective curriculum requires instructors to first determine what kind of transformation they would like to generate. In this paper, we will review how our own research led to questions, insights and examples about transformation.

At a recent AEE conference, I (Bob) chatted about transformation with another experiential education practitioner, but we had difficulty connecting on the matter. I was referring to a deep ecological notion of transformation involving a questioning of cultural practices revealed in educational experiences. She was referring to her important work on substance abuse therapy. Our disconnect stemmed from not specifying what we meant by 'transformation.' By way of a beginning we could suggest long-term versus short-term, moral/political versus neutral, ecological versus human-centered. For the sake of clarity, let's call the transformation that stems from work in substance abuse therapy 'transformation,' and the deep ecological notion of change that involves a rethinking of one's world-view 'Transformation.'

Roots of Interest

The authors' background on transformation stems from two separate research projects. In both projects, we found that personal change, or transformation varied in four ways: *content* or area of change, *degree* or intensity of change, *longevity* of change post-course, and finally, extent of *integration* of the transformed perspective with other areas of their lives. A prevalent example involves *time*. Change in behavior may occur in one's orientation to time as a *content* area. One may shift in *degree* from an intense mechanical time structure to a more balanced input of bodily time, whereby there are times when one sleeps when they are tired, eats when they are hungry, and doesn't live by a daily list of events. The *longevity* of this shifting may be short-term or long-term, depending on inhibiting factors. The *integration* of time as a lifestyle issue is connected to other lifestyle factors, such as stress, health, friendship, and so on.

Research One: Outward Bound and 'transformation'

The first project involved longitudinal research conducted over a year with youth on Outward Bound long courses (21 days). Through interviews and participant observation, we constructed student narratives at three points: a month before, at the end of, and 3 months after the course. This approach highlighted the broader life context in which a course takes place, and also provided a baseline of the students' pre-course state of mind, expectations and development. The narratives confirmed that they were indeed undertaking a range of transformational learnings. Importantly however, the two post-course interviews indicated significant variation in these transformations among students.

For the purposes of this paper, there were two key learnings regarding transformation. First, transformations are *partial, personal,* and *themed*: these students did not transform their whole identities or but rather used their personal background to choose to focus on certain lessons and adapt them to their own needs. This recollects the "continuity of learning" implicit to experiential education (Dewey 1938). Their narratives also usually indicated one or two key insights that became the theme(s) around which most course experiences were 'storied.'

Three students from one brigade illustrate these theories. Before the course, Jeremy indicated to me that he did not feel confident about his leadership skills. After the course, Jeremy's telling of the experience reflected on implicit attention to the leadership aspects of various events, and how these changed his understanding and confidence in leading. The two other students emphasized other aspects of the same events. Students can intuit what skills they need to develop.

The second revelation in these students' narratives, was that for most people, achieving transformation or Transformation requires different strategies and techniques, even if the basic experience is similar (Cushing 1997b). Most students were able to achieve some degree of transformation that moved them along the "trajectory of maturation", such as: the desirability of initiative, compromise, listening, caring for others and the earth. However, only two of the 22 interviewees appeared to move even slightly beyond that normative trajectory to a more critical, or radical awareness along the lines of deep ecology, eco-feminists, or even a more moderate shift to seeing their personal or moral role in sustaining one system over another.

This should not be surprising. It is not Outward Bound's mission to convert its students into social or socio-environmental activists. It did indicate, however, that if one *did* want to achieve such an objective, it would require a different set of techniques than that employed in this classic experiential education model. Cultural studies have demonstrated that because students bring their existing world-view into their learning experiences, they will tend to interpret new experiences within those conventional frameworks, unless given compelling new ones to use (Fraser 1994; Janmohamed 1994). In other words, when we choose to 'let the mountains speak for themselves,' we are actually implicitly encouraging the status quo interpretation.

Research Two: Aiming for 'T'ransformation

The second research project studied a course that in fact *begins* with a specific set of 'Transformational' objectives and employs a set of strategies to that end. This is a university-level travel course designed with in-class and experiential field components. It assumes from the start, that an 'effective' environmental education must address fundamental issues with the way we dwell on the earth.

The instructor prepares interventions designed to facilitate a disorienting ambience, setting the mood for challenging the students' conventional assumptions about the earth and their relation to it. In deep ecology, this sort of change of consciousness can be called

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"Self-realization," meaning to extend the personal 'self' outwards to encompass a broader circle of connections ecologically and spiritually (Naess 1989). Some examples of these disorienting experiential techniques include (Henderson 1995):

- no watches: learning to live without a rigid sense of mechanical time;
- stories: being immersed in an environment where stories are given time and value;
- being: having the time to simply be with a place and with yourself; spontaneous play;
- silence: privileging space and silence over 'activities' in the scheduling;
- living: in a course environment which emphasizes the learning potential in experiential epistemological approaches over conventional, transmissive ones.
- cross-cultural exposure: incorporation of Eastern tea ceremonies and Native Canadian historical learning into the experience

Analysis of the students' course journals over a period of ten years, indicated that the process was working, in that their reflections demonstrated a connection between structural disorientation and incipient Transformational learning that went beyond their usual, taken-for-granted educational experiences (Henderson 1995). Many students wrote about events or ideas that made them question the way they had previously thought about something.

Another common revelation is often reported in connection to their relationship with nature. Many students articulate a new appreciation of the wilderness. While the experience generates different focal insights for each student, the overall effect of the interventions does seem to achieve the beginnings of the kind of altered and critical awareness that they are designed to facilitate.

A Typology of Transformational Aims

The following typology is an effort to delineate between basic types of programming to facilitate a more strategic approach to curriculum design for various pathways to transformation. The model draws on our own work, but also that of others' whose work we cannot cover here because of space (Cherryholmes 1988; Turner 1969; Bacon 1983; Priest 1996, Fay 1977):

- ***Skill*** (to develop, or even transform skills according to given guidelines)
- ***Citizen*** (to transform, as in to *develop* students' views of the world and their role in it), and
- ***Ecological*** (to transform *society* by encouraging students to rethink the existing social order and cultural assumptions about how we dwell on the earth (Cushing 1997b).

The 'transformation' of *skill* development and *citizenship* maturation does not involve questioning our core values or the socio-cultural ecological order. Here, "education is a function of society," and accordingly serves society (Tappan and Brown, 1989: 200). For an ecological Transformation, the fundamental assumptions and practices of our socio-ecological order are challenged as certain ecological realities come to bear heavily on our consciousness through our educational experiences. Here, "society becomes a function of education"; and this education is bent on reforming through spiritual growth, individual agency and ecological vision (loc. Cit.).

We hope that this paper has directed some relevant attention to the area, and that the typology of transformative learning can operate as a starting point for further discussions.

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